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November 27, 2001

The Honorable Doug Sutherland
Commissioner of Public Lands
Washington State Department of Natural Resources
1111 Washington Street Southeast
Post Office Box 47001
Olympia, Washington 98504-7001

Dear Mr. Sutherland:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding water quality in the Lake Whatcom watershed. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you and the Whatcom Landscape Committee our understanding of some of the issues surrounding the watershed. In addition, I would like to thank you for acknowledging the work of Richard Rodriguez. I will let him know that his efforts are appreciated.

The state's drinking water regulations require Group A water systems using surface water as a source of drinking water to develop watershed control programs. An essential element of a watershed control program is the identification of "activities/land uses detrimental to water quality." This element of the watershed control program should identify all activities/land use practices within the watershed that affect or have the potential to affect source water quality.

The Source Water Protection Plan for Lake Whatcom prepared by the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County Water District #10 (WCWD #10) identifies a number of activities, conditions, and land use practices within the watershed that have or could have an adverse impact on water quality. Additionally, these activities are prioritized by their potential to adversely impact water quality. These activities are generally classified as follows:

- TIER 1: Residential development, municipal/commercial uses, and transportation;
- TIER 2: Domestic livestock grazing and timber management;
- TIER 3: On-site septic, recreation and fish and wildlife;
- TIER 4: Mining;
- TIER 5: Alluvial fans; and
- TIER 6: Research and Education.

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We expect that the City of Bellingham and WCWD #10 assess the public health risk associated with each of these types of activities/land uses.

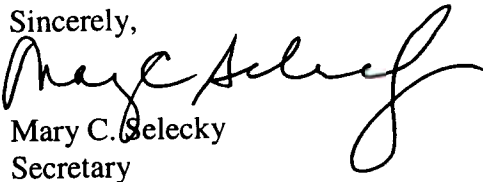
It is our understanding that very few of the potential contaminant sources identified in the Source Water Protection Plan for Lake Whatcom could originate from State Forest Lands or DNR activities. In addition, the water treatment facilities located on Lake Whatcom have been designed and constructed in response to activities historically associated with the state forest lands. A significant increase in the intensity of an activity or a significant change in the type of activities that are occurring would, of course, cause us concern about water quality.

At this time, the Department is not requesting any changes to the programs and documents mentioned in your letter. We have not received requests from the Lake Whatcom purveyors or from our Water Supply Advisory Committee to seek changes to the water quality protection measures that they identify. It is our understanding that the Forest Practice Rules and the DNR Forest Resources Plan and HCP were developed to protect the environment; typically, practices that protect the environment usually protect drinking water sources.

The Department participated in DNR's 1999 Lake Whatcom Interagency Advisory Committee. That advisory committee developed water quality protection recommendations that targeted prevention or reduction of future sediment loads reaching Lake Whatcom from DNR's activities in the watershed. DNR should consider implementing the recommendations of that committee. As noted, the Department is currently participating in DNR's Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan advisory committee. Site-specific recommendations identified by that process related to enhancing water quality should also be considered.

If you should have any further questions, please contact Bob James, Division of Drinking Water, Northwest Regional Office at 360-395-6768.

Sincerely,



Mary C. Selecky
Secretary

cc: Bob James
Richard Rodriguez